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ABSTRACT

The Best Practices Project of the Family Resource Coalition of American (FRCA) began in 1991 with the aim of meeting the need for better definition and articulation of what constitutes best practice in family support programs. This monograph, the third in a series of four, reports on some of the ideas about cultural democracy which have generated debate, challenge, and change within the FRCA. Cultural democracy is an operational framework in which family support professionals actively seek to include the experiences, ideas, and practices of ethnic and language minority family members, practitioners, academics, and lay workers in family support policy implementation, program development, and service delivery. Rather than being a dispassionate study of the phenomenon of cultural diversity within the family support movement, this monograph is written from the perspective of the Latino and African-American Caucuses of the FRCA and reflects their concerns. It discusses issues that have significant impact on the unequal power and decision-making influence held by non-Euro-Americans in the national family support movement, including the assumption that minority advocates who promote culturally specific practices and models of family support are incompetent, and the general exclusion of the expertise and experience of minority professionals from such important policy-shaping arenas as significant professional journals, textbooks, publications, funding sources, and research institutions. Because cultural democracy is about power negotiation and equity in a multicultural society, there is also a brief discussion relating ethnic conflict between minority groups to family support issues and policy. Particular attention is paid to conflicts between African and Latino American communities. Drawing on reflections, interviews, and observations, six principles of cultural democracy in family support work are offered, and the process by which these principles were critiqued by Caucus members at the 1996 FRCA biennial conference is described. (Contains 17 references.) (EV)

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Culture and Power in Practice: Cultural Democracy and the Family Support Movement

BY MARIA SOL M. AKINYELA, PH.D.

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Guidelines for Effective Practice

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About the Best Practices Project

Culture and Power in Practice: Cultural Democracy and the Family Support Movement is the third monograph in the "Guidelines for Effective Practice" series commissioned by the Best Practices Project of the Family Resource Coalition of America. The Project began in 1991 with a vision of meeting the need for better definition and articulation of what constitutes best practice in family support programs. In the course of working to realize that vision, the Project identified four critical areas in which additional research and documentation were needed, and turned to experts in fields connected to family support to review and analyze the literature in the following areas: *Linking Family Support and Early Childhood Programs: Issues, Experiences, Opportunities* (Mary Larner); *Key Characteristics and Features of Community-Based Family Support Programs* (Carl Dunst); *Cultural Democracy in Family Support Practice* (Makungu Akinyela); and *Community-Based Family Support Centers: Working with Abusive and At-Risk Families* (Joyce Thomas), to be published.

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To say that "Guidelines for Effective Practice" is a collaboration is an understatement; neither it nor the Best Practices Project as a whole would be possible without the combined efforts of many.

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Introduction

In June 1997 President Bill Clinton called for a national dialogue on race, to generate open, frank, and honest discussion among the American people about issues of ethnicity, cultural diversity, and full inclusion into American society for all the people who live here. Even before the president introduced the idea of the dialogue on race to the American people, however, this much-needed discussion had been occurring within the Family Resource Coalition of America and among its various constituency groups. For the past four years a dialogue on race, culture, and power has been intentionally taken up at the insistence of the African-American and Latino Caucuses of the FRCA and with the support of several members of the FRCA Board of Directors. This discussion has been necessary because we realize that the movement is not immune to the problems of racism, sexism, and class domination that affect the rest of our society. This sometimes painful but always productive dialogue has been much more than a simple discussion on race and cultural diversity, however. We have sharpened our discussion and identified it as a dialogue about cultural democracy.

The purpose of this monograph is to report on some of the ideas about cultural democracy which have generated debate, challenge, and change within the Family Resource Coalition of America. This paper is not a dispassionate study of the phenomenon of cultural diversity within the family support movement. It is written from the perspective of the Latino and African-American Caucuses of the FRCA, and it reflects their concerns. The paper is informed by the varied experiences and fields of the constituencies of the Caucuses, which include administrators, workers, academics, policymakers, and parent advocates of family support. It is not the purpose of this monograph to attempt to present conclusive data about the state of cultural democracy within the family support movement or to provide answers for every issue raised. It is intended rather to promote discussion and encourage problem solving among family support advocates, practitioners, and policymakers.

Methodology

The ideas and experiences that inform this monograph were gathered by several means, beginning with reflection on dialogues initiated within the Caucuses and with FRCA staff and board members. In addition, interviews were conducted with workers and administrators from the Drew Child Development Corporation in Los Angeles, California, and The Family Place family support center in Washington, D.C. These agencies provided opportunities for observer participation by the writer in day-to-day activities and programs. Perspectives on policy were gained by interviews with Dr. Karen Williams and Jerry Tello in Los Angeles. Valuable insight was also gained from discussions with Hedy Chang of California Tomorrow.

What Do We Mean By Cultural Democracy?

The term cultural democracy is used in various fields of cultural and ethnic studies.[1] The African-American and Latino Caucuses have shaped an understanding of cultural democracy that can be applied to the unique work of family support. Cultural democracy is an operational framework in which family support professionals actively seek to include the experiences, ideas, and practices of ethnic and language minority family members, practitioners, academics, and lay workers in family support policy implementation, program development, and service delivery. Family support within the philosophical framework of cultural democracy requires personal and institutional commitment to power sharing and equity between all the cultural communities involved in and served by the family support movement. For the purposes of this paper, power within the context of family support is defined as the ability to establish legitimacy and authority, and separately or in combination to set policy, develop programs, define practice, disseminate theory, and direct funds in such a manner as to have wide-ranging influence over the practice of family support.

Cultural democracy focuses the attention of family support advocates on the problem of managing cultural diversity in a manner which allows the needs and concerns of ethnic minority communities to be addressed honestly, directly, and under terms set by the communities themselves. It places the issue of family support within a sociopolitical context marked by systemic, institutional

domination of families and individuals based on race/ethnicity, gender, and class. Cultural democracy, by identifying the lack of equal access to power for minority families, practitioners, and policymakers, challenges family support advocates to make power equity a central goal of family support work.

Uninhibited dialogue about cultural democracy among practitioners and policy- makers will deepen our understanding of difficult issues confronting American society and the family support movement, and lead us toward more effective practice and program delivery in all communities. At this point in history it does not really matter whether we identify this work with President Clinton's dialogue on race or whether we speak of multiculturalism, cultural diversity, or cultural competence. However we choose to describe it, this much-needed dialogue must be frank and open about cultural integrity, power sharing, and community self-determination, all of which have been critical elements of the FRCA's discussion of cultural democracy over the past four years. This type of fearless and liberating discussion between various ethnic and language constituencies of the family support movement will be critical to the further development of effective guidelines to family support practice. The dialogue will require that we not be intimidated by the possibility of temporary misunderstanding or discomfort, that we be—in the words of one of our Caucus steering committee members—unafraid to "struggle through the struggle."

This paper will discuss issues that have significant impact on the unequal power and decision-making influence held by non-Euro-Americans in the national family support movement. These issues include such things as the assumption that minority advocates who promote culturally specific practices and models of family support are incompetent. Another issue commonly experienced by minority family support advocates is the general exclusion of the expertise and experience of minority professionals from such important policy-shaping arenas as significant professional journals, textbook publications, funding sources, and research institutions.

Because cultural democracy is about power negotiation and equity in a multicultural society, there will also be a brief discussion relating ethnic conflict between minority groups to family support issues and policy. Particular attention will be paid to conflicts between African and Latino American communities.

From these reflections, interviews, and observations, six principles of cultural democracy in family support work were developed (see page 9). These principles inspired reflection and dialogue among Caucus members, who saw that they needed to be subjected to a process of critique, testing, and feedback. This was done during the 1996 FRCA biennial conference in a process described on page 9, where the principles are explored in greater detail.

Negotiating for Power and Cultural Integrity in Family Support

In preparation for this paper, the writer had conversations in Los Angeles, California, with Dr. Karen Williams, the clinical director of family preservation for the Charles Drew Child Development Corporation in the Watts community of Los Angeles, and with Mr. Jerry Tello, a consultant on positive family support practice and cultural work with Latino families.

In private conversations, minority family support advocates will complain to each other about the common experience of feeling that Euro-American administrators, co-workers, or clients doubt their ability to perform adequately in their chosen fields. This perception of doubt is such a prevalent experience—in contexts beyond family support—that being told by parents or mentors that "you can't just be as good at what you do as white people, you have to be ten times better before they'll give you your proper recognition" is an early learning experience common to many. A related perception is the sense that the legitimacy of minority family support advocates' attempts to proactively represent the cultural interests of their community constituents in family support policy is constantly in question.

The psychological and emotional tensions generated by these perceptions underlie and influence every area of policy and practice of minority family support advocates. Commenting on her own experience of this, Dr. Williams said, "Until two years ago, family preservation in the black community was done by white agencies. Today it is more community-based. With the new DCS [Department of Children's Services] funding program, agencies must be part of the community they serve and they must have a record of previous service over a three year period at a site in the

community." Dr. Williams believes that Drew and other African-American and Latino agencies have been funded because of this stipulation. However, she reported that Euro-American agencies which do not meet the requirements resented this new policy. She continued, "There has been a strong reaction to that. Folks are saying that family preservation is not working in Los Angeles. There is a mounting campaign by some white agencies to say that it is not working. There is the insinuation from these agencies that black agencies are not competent to do the work of family preservation." As a result of pressure brought by agencies outside of the community, Dr. Williams said, "we have had an auditor from DCS auditing the records of our family preservation work for the last three months." Other agencies have been audited as well. She said that in her experience this type of scrutiny, unprovoked by any previous problems, is unheard of.

When I shared this story with other family support advocates and practitioners in the "Culture and Power in Practice" seminar of the 1996 FRCA conference, they generally identified with this experience of having one's competency to carry out family support work in one's own community questioned.

Access to Resources and Policy Shaping Institutions

These experiences of non-Euro-American family support advocates indicate both possible systemic blocks to access to resources and the fact that policy may adversely affect family support practice. Bowen and Sellers point out that "the upper echelons of the family support movement continue to be predominantly white. Inclusion of those who represent culturally diverse viewpoints at policy-making levels within the family support movement is especially crucial in developing programs and policies for working with the socially vulnerable."[2] Bowen and Sellers also point out that while the input of minorities is sought at the program level, it is trivialized at the policy-making level. Similarly, while research and theoretical works on family support issues by non-Euro-American practitioners can be found in journals and books published by organizations and publishers that address specific ethnic communities, their work is rarely included in the professional journals of dominant Euro-American organizations except in special issues dedicated to cultural diversity. Research and theoretical literature play a significant role in informing and shaping family support policy. The marginalization of the ideas of minority professionals, in special editions of mainstream journals and in ethnically specific publications that receive much less attention by policymakers, is common. This practice can only mean that the experiences and ideas of non-Euro-Americans have little influence in shaping policy that ultimately affects family support work in minority communities.

Reflecting the complexity of the growing diversity of American society, family support policy in Latino communities faces some culturally specific challenges. Pachon and DeSipio point out that the Latino family suffers greatly from a lack of Latino influence in policy making.[3] They argue that a great part of the gap in effective policy for Latino families is what they call "the biracial approach to the study of family poverty." They explain for example, that in a study of children in poverty by the Congressional Research Service, "of fifty statistical examinations in the CRS study, 41 depicted child poverty as a white versus black or white versus non-white phenomenon. Only five tables compared Hispanic poverty to poverty among whites and blacks." They highlight the implications of this when they write, "Based on the CRS study, a Congressional staff member would not know what causes and perpetuates poverty among Hispanic children." They note that the Census Bureau generates a similar clouding of data on Latino families by focusing on a black/white examination of data rather than looking at the specific issues confronting Latino families.

Jerry Tello posed a culturally affirming solution to the problem of policy usually being created by those who do not understand the Latino cultures that define and give direction to Latino community programs. When asked how the cultural integrity of Latino families can be maintained in regard to family support policy, Tello said, "We should not let external policies dictate the internal process of our programs...[Latino] family support program coordinators have to translate the internal strength of the community into the theoretical and policy language of the outside." Speaking to the issue of language and perception of meaning in language, Tello said, "In interpreting to the outside policy people, we may use the same words [as Euro-Americans] but we must clarify the deeper complexity in the indigenous meaning." Tello said that this

culturally self-determining attitude is very different from the attitude usually informing the creation of policies: the usual practice is for external agencies to define and give direction to community programs. These agencies expect the programs to be developed to fit the policy.

When asked about the challenges and changes now being seen in the family support movement, Tello responded, "The reason why the family support movement is changing is because it hasn't worked! ... Mom, dad, and two kids is not reality anymore, if it ever was. So they say, well, we better redefine this. Policies have to change because what's been out there isn't working." He said that as the family support movement changes, policy development must be guided by the cultures and internal strengths and practices of the communities that they affect.

Dr. Williams relates the question of culturally relevant family support policy to power negotiations between the community and dominant Euro-American controllers of policy. She emphasizes the emotional stress that confronting issues of family support policy places on non-Euro-Americans. When asked about her organization's participation in policy making she said, "we have not been involved in the policy-making end of family support work to this point because those policy-making boards are such a toxic environment that it is difficult to remain a part of them." However, she said that as the need for strong representation from the black community in policy making has become more evident, the agency has become more involved. One of the policy issues that Drew and other family support agencies in Los Angeles are challenging is outcome assessment. Dr. Williams was asked to explain some of the different expectations in outcome assessment between policy-making boards and community family support organizations: "They look at numbers to see if there is a reduction in out-of-home placements of children. We look at quality-of-life issues and whether there are systemic barriers to people being able to reach their goals." When asked to explain this systems view of outcome evaluation, Dr. Williams said she believes that the notion of family support is more complex in the thinking of black and Latino family support advocates. "Lack of success by a family to remain cohesive in their home may be systemic. Mom using drugs after an extended time of involvement with our program may be related to no availability of an affordable recovery program even when she is motivated to change." While policy boards are concerned primarily with quantitative and statistically verifiable change, they rarely consider such issues as institutional racism or other issues of systemic institutional domination in their equations. Dr. Williams said good assessment of outcomes depends on seeing circumstances as variable.

Negotiating Democracy Between Subordinate Cultural Communities

While working together to push forward the dialogue on cultural democracy within the FRCA, the African-American and Latino Caucuses have learned a valuable lesson about the problems and issues of power that can develop between culturally subordinate, non- Euro-American family support advocate groups. These problems are usually grounded in prejudice, distrust, and the desire to gain privilege for one's own community even if it is at the expense of others. The Caucuses have, through patience and a desire to be mutually supportive and equitable, developed what we believe to be an excellent model of power sharing and cultural negotiation in our work with each other. This, however, is not the norm in areas where large groups from different cultures share and attempt to gain access to resources for family support and community work. It is not unusual to hear stories of conflict and intrigue as communities attempt to gain access to power and resources for their families. In this section we will examine three examples of this type of conflict drawn from urban communities in Chicago, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. These situational descriptions will illustrate variations on this theme of tension and cultural conflict that sometimes occurs between subordinate communities vying with each other for family support resources.

A Struggle for Housing In Chicago

Latinos United is a coalition in Chicago whose primary purpose is to develop strategies for ensuring that Latino families have access to public housing. The group argues that while Latinos make up 20 percent of the city's population (the Latino population grew 85 percent between 1970 and 1990), only two percent of the many poor Latinos who have applied for public housing have gotten it. Latinos United representatives say that this has resulted in a

growing housing problem for Latino families in the city. They charge that the Chicago Housing Authority is practicing discrimination against Latino families. According to a Latinos United document on the history of the organization, "CHA became, as a result of misguided, exclusionary policies and practices, the city administration's preferred vehicle for perpetuating segregation." A member of the group explained to the writer that as in much of the United States, public housing in Chicago had been originally set up as a means of ensuring that poor black migrants from the South did not attempt to move into white communities.

The spokesperson explained that over time "public housing has come to be seen as a domain of the black community." However, as the population of Latinos and other ethnic groups has risen in the city, so has their need for housing. Because of the history of public housing, many of the CHA officials are black, and one of the concerns of Latinos United has been that as they work to help Latino families attain affordable housing, they will come into conflict with public officials who will see their work as an attack on the black community. As the group confronts the historic and current systemic discrimination against Latinos and the preference for black families in getting available housing, there is the ongoing possibility that the conflict will be perceived by black citizens of Chicago as an attempt to "take over housing" from black people. To avoid this possible conflict, Latinos United has developed a long-range plan of consultation with black experts on cross-cultural dialogue. They have also engaged in mediation with African-American leaders, family resource centers, and institutions to collectively solve the problem of housing for both African-American and Latino families.

Finding Funds for Family Preservation in Watts

In Chicago, the struggle stems from a bias towards black families that jeopardizes Latino families' possibility of gaining decent housing. In the Watts community of Los Angeles, the Charles Drew Child Development Corporation has had to challenge criticism and fight for legitimacy and the right to define themselves as an African-centered family support program. Some state policy authorities object to this designation and the practice which evolves from it because they say it is exclusionary, even though the Center clearly does not limit it's services to African-Americans in the Watts community. Workers at the Drew Center said that about 85 percent of the families in need of its services in Watts are African-American and about 15 percent are Latino. They go on to add, however, that about 20 to 25 percent of their actual clientele are Latino and the remainder are African-American. The Drew Center's family preservation program works with families of children who are in danger of being placed in foster care. By the turn of the century, according to Census Bureau statistics, the majority population of Watts, along with the rest of Los Angeles, will be clearly Latino. The challenge for an organization like the Charles Drew Child Development Corporation will be to find self-definitions that will allow it to remain authentic to its roots and yet provide much-needed cultural and professional resources to the Latino population, which faces many of the same issues of systemic institutional domination that affects the black families of the community. A family support worker at Drew said, "as South Central Los Angeles changes more, it does raise questions about how we define ourselves. We have to ask whether this is a proper location for the program. We have to insure that more of our staff is bilingual and concerned with the issues of the Latino culture also."

Defining Cultural Interests in Washington, D.C.

As urban centers grow and change, population shifts occur. New constellations of power emerge, and communities are forced to engage with cultural issues which were previously not known to them. This is the situation in Watts and similarly at the New Community Family Place in Washington, D.C. The Family Place was established in 1981 through the efforts of the Church of the Savior. It provides parenting support, drop-in services, child developmental services, and health services to a community which is primarily Salvadoran and Spanish-speaking. The administration and staff of the Family Place is primarily Latino. In 1991 the Family Place program was replicated in an African-American community of Washington, D.C., by a program providing drop-in services, prenatal classes, discussion groups for men and women, and other culturally targeted programs. The atmosphere there is very "homelike," with children's furniture, a warm kitchen with pots on

the stove and people preparing lunch for parents and children, and posters with Afrocentric themes promoting positive health and family life messages.

While the administrators and staff support this replication effort, it has given rise to some stresses that reflect underlying cultural conflicts. There is a sense in the original Spanish language program that resources have been taken away by efforts to develop the African-American center. At the same time, staff members at the African-American center express feelings of being treated like "step children" and getting the leftovers of benefits which come to the Family Place program. African-American staff members said that power sharing is an issue for them in relation to the Latino community Family Place. Until recently there was only one African-American on the predominantly Euro-American board of the Family Place, though there is now both African-American and Latino representation. One staff person said, "if we start talking about power sharing, they [the board] seem to get nervous." The process of getting even some small board representation was a stressful one for the black workers at the Family Place. "When more diversity was called for on the board," said one staff member, "the reaction was, 'they just want to take over.'" Workers from the program at the African-American community Family Place explained that they depend on participants to give feedback to them on the needs of the community. They also said that they would like to see community representation on the board. "But," one worker said, "the board now requires members to make a financial donation, and that might prevent community representatives from being on the board."

There are no easy solutions for any of these situations of ethnic and cultural tension between subordinate groups. They represent the real-life necessity of identifying new approaches to mediating power conflicts in multicultural situations in a manner that understands culture as more than a black and white issue. Power sharing and cultural democracy are always issues in multicultural situations. Family support advocates representing subordinate cultural communities cannot afford to avoid the issue of relationships with other ethnic groups as one of power negotiation. It would be a mistake to assume that the issue of power sharing is important only when Euro-American constituencies are a part of the equation.

In the following section, an assessment of the lessons learned up to this point of the dialogue on cultural democracy will be made. Included in this assessment will be a review of the six principles of cultural democracy and commentary based on feedback received at the FRCA national conference.

What We Have Learned

We in the FRCA have learned several major lessons in the process of this dialogue on cultural democracy within the family support movement. First and foremost, we have learned about the importance of striving for mutually understandable language in the discussion. The need for this has become very apparent as we have discussed power sharing between ethnic communities as an important goal to be reached.

Discussions about power sharing between minority and Euro-American ethnic communities is uncomfortable for many people. This discomfort may be because discussions about power sharing focus attention on the fact that when it comes to interethnic relations, there remains a tremendous social and political inequity between ethnic and language minority communities and the dominant Euro-American ethnic group. When social and political inequality is recognized as a significant deterrent to positive intercultural relations, a dialogue limited to helping diverse ethnic groups understand the various cultural traditions and customs of others falls short. Likewise, programs primarily focused on developing cultural competence in Euro-American professionals do not adequately address the cultural issues related to family support perceived by many minority professionals.

African and Latino Americans often express culturally distinctive and vastly different concerns from those identified by Euro-Americans when the subject of power sharing comes up. Ethnic and language minority peoples are concerned about how the cultural worldview of Euro-Americans affects minority groups' use of social and economic power. Minority practitioners are also concerned about how the lack of cultural power and influence by minorities affects the ability of programs to effectively support minority families. Consequently, minority family support professionals are interested in discussing fairness in power distribution. A philosophical framework based in cultural

democracy will not permit family support policy and practice solutions that naively require ethnic groups to "share information" with each other about cultural traditions. Instead, there would be an emphasis on problem solving and on searching for solutions to the disproportionate distribution of power among cultural groups, particularly between Euro-Americans and minorities, but also, in some urban situations, between different minority groups.

Cultural practice, norms, and the knowledge of them in this multicultural society are potential commodities and gateways to power. Cultural knowledge can be an asset (in the case of knowledge of the Euro-American cultural norms) or a debit (in the case of the cultural knowledge of African, Latin, and Native American peoples); it can be useful or detrimental to one attempting to gain social influence and power. When one form of cultural knowledge is accepted as "normal" while others are seen as "abnormal" or, at best, "exotic" and "other," those who emulate or can appear to embody "normal" (read Euro-American) culture are most likely to have access to power and be able to influence circumstances and life chances.[4] In American society, where skin color and other physical characteristics are often associated with culture, some aspects of cultural diversity become almost impossible to include in the cultural norm. For example, in discussions about welfare reform, it is not uncommon to hear policymakers charge that a lack of commitment to the western "work ethic" is the root cause of poverty, single parent homes, and unemployment. It is also not unusual to hear that these social problems stem from a "lack of morals" within minority communities. Against this effort to institutionalize Euro-American cultural norms, cultural democracy can be a framework by which the ideas, experiences, and knowledge of ethnic and language minority families and of family support advocates may be heard on an equal footing with those of Euro-Americans.

The Importance of Finding Our Own Voices

The dialogue on cultural democracy is a concrete effort within the FRCA to challenge the imposition of Euro-American norms. As noted above, these perspectives on cultural democracy developed out of exchanges within the African-American and Latino caucuses as we have worked to bring our experiences to the wider FRCA constituency. Caucus representatives come from a wide field of knowledge. We represent family support field workers, policy developers, legislative professionals, academics, family support professionals, parents, and lay workers. We come from practically every region of the United States.

African-American and Latino caucus members expressed the concern that the collective voice[5] of minority families is too often unheard, that it is not listened to or is not understood. These families are denied the opportunity to define their collective cultural selves and to be active participants in their own support. Furthermore, the views of ethnic and language minority professionals, academicians, and workers on family support policy and practice have for a long time been either ignored or made secondary to views in the Euro-American mainstream, which determine policy and practice for our communities.

The fluctuating socioeconomic conditions of families in the poorest communities of America affect the need of families for support tremendously. A passage in FRCA's *Guidelines for Family Support Practice*[6] reads:

> Today, times are tough for families. A number of economic factors, from lack of job security to increasing numbers of mothers in the workforce have resulted in all families having less time and resources to devote to their children. Changes in family structure brought about by divorce, remarriage, and single parenthood have altered traditional bonds among family members.
>
> Geographic mobility has stranded young families far from the support of friends and members of their extended families. Many neighborhoods are not providing a safe, healthy environment for children. Growing poverty among children—in two-worker households as well as in single parent households—has left many families without the means to meet basic needs.

These issues are indeed significant factors that affect the ability of families to thrive, feel cohesive, and nurture their members. In addition to these general social and economic conditions, ethnic and language inequality and the lack of power in minority communities within the larger society act as additional factors that can diminish the well-being of minority families and communities. These families and communities have no voice in the quality of their own collective lives. In order for a group or individual to have

and use power, it is important that they be understood and listened to as well as that they have the capacity to define themselves as active participants in shaping their own lives. A family support program based in cultural democracy may at times ask different questions from those that have been asked traditionally. One such question focuses on the exact meaning of family support itself.

Rethinking What Family Support Is

It is acknowledged in ever-widening circles of the family support movement that family support must be understood in broader terms than first imagined in the early 1970s. Then, family support programs "focused primarily on assisting parents in establishing a nurturing family environment in the earliest years of a child's life."[7] While family support still focuses on these goals, concepts of just what family support is have grown far beyond this limited view. This point has been strongly promoted by ethnic and language minority practitioners who have argued that the situation for many families in their communities has reached a crisis level. This often means that the families they are most likely to come in contact with are in need of relief from an already existing situation rather than being interested in preventative support. In the same vein, parent education, which is a key focus of family support programs, is more likely to be sought by parents under court order, as opposed to being sought as a preventative measure. In many minority communities, drug use and gang violence are recognized as primary detrimental forces inhibiting family cohesiveness. Practitioners have often found themselves in conflict with the traditional notion of family support work as preventative when their programs address preexisting violence, drug use, and other real-life social conditions in their communities. It is clear to many within the African-American and Latino Caucuses that as we strive to redefine family support in our own cultural interest, the emphasis will be less on trying to say "what family support is" than on describing "what family support does."

Family Organizing Against Systemic Institutional Domination

We have been guided toward focusing on what family support does through our exchanges with family support programs in African, Latino, and Native American communities in a variety of places. One of the outcomes of the 1996 biennial conference of the FRCA was the discovery, through presenters of workshops on the Cultural Democracy track, that there is a sense among family support advocates that in the future the emphasis will be on family organizing as well as family support. In many ethnic and language minority programs, advocates find themselves working with families to challenge local, state, and national ordinances and policies which endanger the well-being of families. In the "Culture and Power in Practice" seminar, presenters told participants that organizing families is necessary in order to create a proactive mind-set in communities that are affected by systemic institutional domination, which has also been called institutional discrimination.[8] Charles Hamilton and Kwame Touré describe it as institutional racism and define it as:

> Those established laws, customs, practices which systematically reflect and produce racial inequities in American society. If racist consequences accrue to institutional laws, customs, or practice, the institution is racist whether or not the individuals maintaining those practices have racist intentions.[9]

The systemic institutional domination of members of non-Euro-American ethnic groups is not dependent upon the ill will of intentionally racist individuals. Racial/ethnic domination that affects families requires collaboration only by the socially and economically privileged to maintain a status quo based on dominant cultural values. Systemic institutional domination reflects conscious and unconscious efforts to resist social change and power sharing between culturally dominant Euro-Americans and other ethnic groups. It ensures that a certain level of power and privilege remains with the dominant group, even when individuals within the group hold no ill feelings toward subordinate groups or individuals. Power sharing or the reluctance to do so is not related to political affiliation. As Knowles and Prewitt point out, "Reform group after reform group speaks of spending more money but remains silent and sharing power".[10]

When families systemically are rendered culturally subordinate, Euro-American family support advocates rarely consult with the families they work with.[11] Systemic institutional domination affects

all aspects of the lives of the subordinated. It affects their ability to become educated, to work, and to parent their children; it even affects the ability of members of the dominated group to see themselves through their own eyes rather than through the biased eyes of the dominant person. A cursory review of recent news and literary events will give one a sense of the political and social impact of policy and law which supports systemic institutional domination.

In September 1997, Lino Graglia, a tenured Euro-American law professor at the University of Texas, speaking about black and Latino students' ability to compete with white students, said, "These [black and Latino] cultures do not encourage achievement. Failure is not looked upon with disgrace." He went on to say, "Blacks and Mexican-Americans are not academically competitive with whites in selective institutions." Professor Graglia, who at one time was considered for a federal position by the Reagan administration, vocally expressed the personal thoughts of a significant number of Euro-Americans in positions of power and influence who are no longer willing to share educational resources and other social opportunities with minority citizens. He and others are willing and able to use their power and influence to shape policy to prevent members of minorities from participating in the activities necessary for gaining individual and collective social and economic power.

State legislation such as propositions 187 and 209 in California and federal efforts at so-called welfare reform reflect the growing success of systemic institutional subordination as reflected in public policy. Books such as *The Bell Curve*[12] and *The End of Racism*[13] reflect the popularization and legitimization of cultural domination through popular publications by powerful and respected individuals. These changing public policies and their popularization through literature and other media contribute to the further disenfranchisement of ethnic and language minority communities. They also contribute to a trend of rising tension and conflict between an increasingly diverse population of ethnic communities all vying to hold on to or obtain the power to influence the quality of the lives of their families.

As the voices of very powerful Euro-Americans continue to be heard and believed, the cultures and cultural knowledge of minority families are seen less and less as "normal." This has a devastating effect on the cultural power of minority practitioners and policymakers and upon the respect accorded their knowledge, which is often excluded or discounted even when information, ideas, or input is needed about the lives of families in minority communities.

Toward Principles to Guide Our Practice

The principles of family support outlined and illustrated in *Guidelines for Family Support Practice* are an excellent point from which to build a unified and productive family support movement. But although the guidelines derived from these principles are necessary if we are to have a way of gauging our practice of family support at present, they are far from sufficient. A complementary set of principles, one that addresses issues of culture specifically, has been conceived:

1. **Cultural self-determination is an essential element of successful family support programs.**

Ethnic communities should define and articulate cultural values and expressions which meet their needs and reflect their perspectives and experiences within programs. This includes designing the ways in which programs analyze families' situations and conduct outreach, and contributing their knowledge to program implementation.

2. **Training in cultural diversity issues in family support is a priority; it should be ongoing, not a one- or two- time event.**

When culture is seen as the primary expression of each community's self-definition, then culture—and knowledge regarding how to interact within and between various cultural communities—will be seen as an essential skill for family support advocates. Cultural diversity training in a context of cultural democracy would avoid privileging Euro-American culture as the standard by which all other cultures are understood. Antiracism, antisexism, and resisting the economic class structure would be integral aspects of ongoing cultural democracy training.

3. **The ethnic/cultural makeup of the staff—including managers, line staff, administrative staff, and paraprofessionals—matters: staffing should reflect the linguistic, cultural, and ethnic makeup of the community being served.**

Studies[4] show that parents place importance on being matched with professionals from their own ethnic groups as a means of avoiding racism, as well as on language and cultural congruency between the family and family support workers. When family members do not see members of their own ethnic communities represented throughout a program, they may receive a subtle negative message that can be interpreted as a statement against the community's right to power, self-determination, and control of cultural resources.

4. **Defining and developing a group identity among program participants and with the community as a whole is a key element to family and community power.**

Group identity and involvement with the family's primary culture is a method for empowering families and the community to take actions that will change conditions of systemic institutional domination. When the building of strong ethnic group identity in a community is supported, the basis is set for community members to engage in a dialogue about their common interests across cultural and ethnic boundaries.

5. **The collective responsibility, commitment, and consciousness of cultural groups should be emphasized and encouraged throughout family support programs.**

When the family support program integrates this principle into its day-to-day practice, it reflects and reinforces the cultural values held by families in its community. In light of the emphasis on the family organizing aspect of family support, this value is very important. As families become organized to help themselves, their sense of responsibility to the community and their knowledge that the community will be responsible to them may be a source of emotional and spiritual strength to reach their goals.

6. **Cultural uniqueness, community pride, and the use of culture as a tool to resist institutional discrimination are key sources of strength for the family and the community; they should be emphasized throughout family support programs.**

Rather than attempting to minimize the cultural uniqueness of each community or to reduce culture in family support to celebrations and food recipes, programs emphasize the ability of culture to resist oppression. They emphasize specific cultural traditions and values, such as the *Ngugo Saba* and *Cara y Corazon*, which place cultural rethinking and resistance at the heart of family organizing and support.

In addition, the following premises help us to understand cultural democracy as it relates to family support:

1. Cultural democracy focuses the attention of family support advocates on the problem of managing cultural diversity in a manner which allows the needs and concerns of ethnic minority communities to be addressed honestly, directly, and under terms set by the communities themselves.

2. Cultural democracy is an operational framework in which family support professionals actively seek to include the experiences, ideas, and practices of ethnic and language minority family members, practitioners, academics, and lay workers in family support policy implementation, program development, and service delivery.

3. Family support within the philosophical framework of cultural democracy requires personal and institutional commitment to power sharing and equity between all the cultural communities involved in and served by the family support movement.

4. Power within the context of family support is defined as the ability to establish legitimacy and authority, and separately or in combination to set policy, develop programs, define practice, disseminate theory, and direct funds in such a manner as to have wide-ranging influence over the practice of family support.

Since these principles and premises were developed, they have been discussed and reviewed by practitioners, parents, academicians, and other family support advocates. The six principles were the basis of a major dialogue during a seminar called

"Culture and Power in Practice" at the 1996 FRCA national conference. Participants in the seminar heard representatives from four family organizing and support programs representing African-American, Latino, and Native American communities. The presenters first described the work of their programs and then discussed how each of the six principles was affirmed or invalidated in the work done by their programs. Of about seventy-five participants in the seminar, about thirty remained to participate in the dialogue process. Of those thirty, nineteen took the time to fill out questionnaires on the principles. After this part of the seminar, the participants broke up into small discussion groups to review the six principles and discussed each one. The primary question asked about each principle was "is this principle clearly stated?" A second question was "if the principle is clearly stated, do you agree with it?" Each small group was then encouraged to write a collective comment on each principle based on their discussions and the answers they provided to the questions. The feedback from this process was taken as qualitative data. Of course, in the context of the conference, too many variables existed to ensure the scientific value of the process. However, the process of the seminar and the generally enthusiastic response of seminar participants made it apparent that a significant number of ethnic and language minority family support advocates believed that these principles raised important issues about and within family support. The overwhelming majority of the responses affirmed that most of the principles were both clear and that they were agreeable to seminar participants. The feedback gathered from this process provides a basis for ongoing dialogue within the FRCA about cultural democracy and its practical implementation in the family support movement.

Conclusion: A Challenge To the Organized Family Support Movement

Since this dialogue on cultural democracy began, the Family Resource Coalition of America has initiated its Best Practices Project, resulting in the publication of *Guidelines for Family Support Practice*.[19] Along with the ongoing debates and dialogue about cultural democracy, this project and the publication of the book are significant moves toward gaining clarity on cultural democracy.

As the Family Resource Coalition of America and other organizations that make up the family support movement attempt to establish guidelines for family support practice, it is clear that the movement is affected by problems that affect every aspect of society: namely, the problems of managing an increasingly culturally diverse society in a manner that allows the real needs and concerns of various communities to be addressed with equity and justice.

The solutions to these problems lie in giving respect to the cultural experiences, ideas, and practices that best serve those communities. On one level, these solutions require family support professionals, institutions, and program developers to put extra effort into constantly being mindful of the diverse culturally shaped needs and issues that various communities served by the family support movement possess. But on a much deeper level, the family support movement as a whole must confront the issue of power sharing at all levels of the movement: from policy to practices, and from those who work with legislation to those who work in community centers and family services units. The FRCA African-American and Latino Caucuses have engaged in dialogues with hundreds of family support practitioners, program administrators, and parents on this subject during biennial FRCA conferences and through contact with our various constituencies across the United States.

For many of us who are African and Latino descendants born in the United States, confronting and managing the problem of cultural bias experienced in the family support movement has become a critical first, long step in building a united, comprehensive, and effective national family support movement. Our major effort within the family support movement as a whole out of necessity has been to pose solutions to cultural inequity through the presentation of cultural democracy as a principled framework from which to view these problems.

We who are advocates for family support can assess programs that strive to support families by viewing program and policies through the lens of the principles of family support described in *Guidelines for Family Support Practice*. These principles allow us to define what family support is by focusing on what it does within the context of the principles. They are particularly helpful as they

relate to culturally relevant family support practices and to culturally diverse practices that ensure that families are supported in a manner which honors their community context and utilizes the strength of families' cultures in developing support mechanisms.

However, as already noted, for black and Latino parents and family support professionals, there are several cogent issues that are not addressed by the principles outlined in *Guidelines for Family Support Practice*. Family support practitioners are including culturally diverse practices in programs, and yet the family support "mainstream" has been unwilling to allow the experiences, ideas, and programs of people of color to influence the direction of the family support movement. The problem is most glaringly exhibited in the ongoing struggle of black and Latino family support workers, intellectuals, and program developers to be recognized within the family support movement as legitimate experts on their own lives and the lives of the families whom they serve on a daily basis. Though it may not always be asked directly, the question that hangs over the heads of professionals who strive to represent their communities with integrity is, "Whom do you represent and what gives you the right to represent them?" These professionals are implicitly asked this question every time a person of color who denies that he or she represents any constituency is applauded for a "non-biased" approach to family support.

The problem of legitimization within the family support movement has far-reaching implications and effects. When the legitimacy of black and Latino professionals is, at best, only partially accepted by the mainstream family support movement, there is a reluctance to consistently include the ideas, experiences, and practices of those professionals in the publications, journals, meetings, conferences, and institutions that influence family support policy. The key word here is consistently, meaning in a pattern and manner that goes beyond the occasional inclusion of the word "multicultural;" such inclusion is little more than reinforcement of the notion that cultural ideas outside of the Eurocentric norm are merely interesting exotica.

Next Steps for the Family Support Movement

Guidelines for Family Support Practice offers a chance put the principles of family support into operation within the context of cultural democracy. We can and should seize this opportunity by using the book's concrete examples of everyday practice as topics in discussion groups and training sessions. These activities can develop family members' and workers' voices so that they have greater influence in both local programs and in the national policy debate. As we engage in dialogue about cultural democracy both inside and outside of the Family Resource Coalition of America and the family support movement, these guidelines can serve as concrete examples that will place cultural democracy in context.

Throughout these discussions, we should continue including and referring to the voices of those in the field, including workers and parents who are not part of the organized family support movement or FRCA. This was the most important aspect of the research methodology behind *Guidelines for Family Support Practice*, and should be continued as we deepen our efforts. We should continue to draw on the ideas and experiences of grassroots folk and use the book as "a basis for setting standards for and expectations of how staff and programs carry out their daily work." However, we must also allow the rich practice-related information that the book offers to inform the development and practice of the organized family support movement within the context of cultural democracy.

We in the organized movement need to discuss and answer the many questions that *Guidelines for Family Support Practice* raises: What do the guidelines for relationship-building imply for those of us in the organized movement? What new ways can be developed to understand the diversity of values that is necessary to build this movement? How can the movement create an environment that makes participants from each cultural, gender, and economic community feel valued and welcomed? How will we work to ensure that all participants in the family support movement are encouraged to use all of their capacity to build an effective movement? And how will we do this in light of our very real and very dynamic cultural diversity? How will we ensure that the voices of the diverse communities within the family support movement are represented within the governance structures with equity and integrity?

The data gathered in the *Guidelines for Family Support Practice* not only raise but can help us answer these questions in many different ways. The book offers concrete and effective directions and opportunity for building cultural democracy throughout the family support movement in day-to-day family support work, program administration, and theory and policy development: it should be a central element that defines the upcoming FRCA biennial conference in May 1998.

Next Steps for FRCA

The Family Resource Coalition of America must not only work to help the family support movement develop sensitivity and sound practice in delivering culturally competent support to all families; it must also take the lead in eliminating institutional cultural bias and monocultural domination from family support program policy and development. This will require including the voices of people of color at all levels of a program's decision-making process, based not simply on the color of their skin, but on their consciousness and commitment to the cultural integrity and advancement of the communities that they represent.

Cultural democracy requires a commitment to sharing power and equity in all levels of the family support movement. The Family Resource Coalition of America and the family support movement are not monolithic, as evidenced by the presence of the African-American and Latino Caucuses, other emerging ethnically identified groups, and groups that share other family-related interests. Even within these caucuses and groups, individuals have diverse experiences and ideas that can be powerful tools in building a dynamic family support movement. This potential can only be realized through power sharing and cultural democracy.

The commitment called for by the FRCA African-American and Latino Caucuses is both personal and institutional. It requires trust as methods of working together change, and a willingness to "struggle through the struggle" even when the struggle makes us uncomfortable. It is important for those of us who represent the family support movement to remember that the best practices of grassroots family support programs do not occur because we have codified the principles of family support practice. Best practices occur because the principles reflect and are validated by what families and support workers are already doing. It is our responsibility to give voice to these practices and to advocate them in such a way that they will positively influence both long- and short-range policy. The ongoing effort to clarify cultural democracy and rethink family support, as well as the publication of *Guidelines for Family Support Practice*, are important parts of carrying out that responsibility.

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